ISSN 2351-6658
ISSN (ONLINE) 2351-6666

HISTORICAL CONDITIONS OF MUTUAL STEREOTYPES: BELARUSIANS, LITHUANIANS AND POLES

MAŁGORZATA BABIŃSKA

Abstract: Stereotypes are social facts operating in every social reality and influencing the contacts of individuals, social groups and nations. Therefore, stereotypes should not bother but rather be the object of studies, especially in the Central and Eastern Europe in the context of the political changes taking place since 1989. The aim of the paper is to present the methodology of the research on stereotypes and the reliable research on the mutual stereotypes of Belarusians, Lithuanians and Poles.

Keywords: Nation, Research Method, Neighbourhood, National Stereotypes, National Consciousness.

ГІСТАРЫЧНЫЯ ЎМОВЫ ЎЗАЕМНЫХ СТЭРЭАТЫПАЎ: БЕЛАРУСЫ, ЛІТОЎЦЫ І ПАЛЯКІ

Анатацыя: Стэрэатыпы з’яўляюцца неад’емнымі фактамі кожнай сацыяльнай рэчаіснасці і ўплываюць на міжасабовыя кантакты, адносіны паміж сацыяльнымі групамі, нацыямі. Менавіта таму стэрэатыпы трэба разглядаць як аб’ект вывучэння, асабліва калі гаворка вядзецца пра Цэнтральную і Усходнюю Еўропу ў кантэксце палітычных зменаў, якія адбываюцца з 1989 года. У сваёй працы аўтар ставіў мэтаю прадставіць метадалогію даследавання стэрэатыпаў і правесці абгрунтаванае даследаванне ўзаемных клішэ беларусаў, літоўцаў і палякаў.

Ключавыя словы: нацыя, метад даследавання, суседства, нацыянальныя стэрэатыпы, нацыянальная самасвядомасць.

The measurement of stereotypes proposed by D. Katz and K. Braly is the most commonly used method to examine the issue of national stereotypes (Błuszkowski, 2003: 106f.). Such a survey was conducted for the first time in 1933 among the American students and concerned the functioning of ethnic and racial stereotypes. The respondents were given a list of adjectives describing the human qualities and names referred to 10 ethnic groups, and they were asked to assign the most typical or characteristic qualities to these ethnic groups. The ethnic stereotype of each group was operationally defined as a set of twelve adjectives which were most often assigned to that group. Over the years, new ways to generate lists of features appeared in order to eliminate irregularities concerning typical characteristics of a group. The technic of Osgood's semantic differential – which was used during the work on this paper – is an example of such a research method (Oppenheim, 2004: 273–278). In this method, the respondents receive a set of bipolar scales (such as: good – bad, big – small, etc.) and a task to determine the extent to which a quality put on a list appear in a particular social group. The rate of occurrence can determine the profiles characterising this group, with the use of the indicated adjectives.

The literature on national stereotypes is very rich since anthropologists, linguists, psychologists, sociologists, and historians alike deal with this problem. However, of particular note are the works of A. Kłoskowska and A. Jasińska-Kania. The book: "Nations and Stereotypes" (ed. T. Walas), is considered by the author as trustworthy because it presents the issue from the point of view of different nations (Belarusian, Lithuanian and Polish) and the analyses contained in them partially overlap with the observations made by the author herself during the research on the Polish and Czech borderlands (pogranicze kłodzko-orlickie) in 2010.

The three nations which have never constituted a homogeneous group are the subjects of the present analysis. They differ in terms of several political and social dimensions. It is worth to mention that they were formed as modern nations in the different circumstances during the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, the experiences of these three nations can affect the shape of their mutual relations, in a more or less noticeable way.

Mutual stereotypes of Belarusians, Lithuanians and Poles seem to be a difficult subject since the neighbourhood of these nations was not conflict-free throughout the centuries. Knowledge of historical aspects of the formation and transformation of nations is an essential foundation for all sorts of considerations that relate specifically to these issues (Kłoskowska, 1992: 131; on a very notion of history: Vladislav, 1988: 36).

Belarusians (as seen through the eyes of Poles)

Journalist Bohdan Cywiński notes, *"Out of all our neighbours, we are*

able to say least about… Belarusians" (Antipenka, 1995: 95). According to a widespread Polish view, a contemporary Belarusian speaks Russian, reads Russian newspapers, has no idea about the history of his nation, and goes to the Russian Orthodox Church. The stereotypical image of a Belarusian allows us to add, however, that he is characterised by strong affection for his native land. Belarusians deal with poverty and suffering; they seem to be gloomy; they are introverts; they do not like risk, and they are unfamiliar with any spirit of revolution, such idea is unknown to them. Leonard Okołów-Podhorski described this country, in his volume entitled "Belarus" (1924), as a land of happiness, permeated with sadness (Antipenka, 1995: 95–98; Ziejka, 1995: 103; Sadowski, 1999: 259–260).

Lithuanians (as seen through the eyes of Poles)

According to the paper of the philosopher Juozas Girnius entitled "The Lithuanian Character's Problem" (first edition in 1947), the metaphysical image of Lithuania has been formed by two symbols: The Pursuit and Christ Pensive – Knight and Sufferer. Lithuanians living at the crossroad of Slavic and Germanic worlds do not have any defects of their neighbours and they possess primarily good characteristics. The image of Lithuanians presented by Girnius is a perfect description of the stereotypical Lithuanian national character. They are extremely peaceful but able also to defend themselves if they have to. They are perceived as generous, righteous and good people (Venclova, 1995: 77–84). In opposition to this ideal (thus not entirely real) image of Lithuanians are those who show both their negative and positive features. The positive features assigned to Lithuanians are the following ones: frugality, care of the house and order, patience and ingeniousness. There is a belief that Lithuanians are reliable in everyday life as well as on business and financial matters. (On some negative features ascribed to Lithuanians by Poles, see Okińczyc, 1995: 85–89).

Poles (as seen through the eyes of Lithuanians and Belarusians)

The image of Poles among Belarusians is rather hazy, indistinct. According to O. A. Łojek, the reason of this situation is probably the fact that Belarusian's knowledge about a Pole is connected with Pole's knowledge about himself (Łojek, 1995: 104). It is related to the fact that Belarus was a theatre scene for the heroes of Polish national literature. Belarusians are convinced of Polish hospitality and talkativeness. In their opinion, Poles *"love their homeland only when they are away from it; being in Poland – they hate it…"* (Łojek, 1995: 107). Currently, Belarusians claim that Poles are suspicious, that their attitude to the government is slightly critical and finally that they constantly complain. Poles' attitude to Belarusians is said to be positive. According to

Belarusians, it is caused by the fact that Poles understand their situation (Dobrynin, 2014). The image of a Pole seen through the eyes of Lithuanians is definitely more negative (Lamanaité, 1995: 90–94).

References

1. Antipenka, Aleksander (1995). “Współczesny Białorusin (przeżywający kryzys etniczny),” in: T. Walas (ed.), *Narody i stereotypy.* Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury.

2. Błuszkowski, Jan (2003), *Stereotypy narodowe w świadomości Polaków,* Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA.

3. Dobrynin, Nikita (2014), Interview with Nikita Dobrynin, 14.05.2014, www.trojmiasto.gazeta.pl.

4. Jasińska-Kania, Aleksandra (ed.) (2001), *Trudne sąsiedztwa. Z socjologii konfliktów narodowościowych,* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR.

5. Kłosowska, Antonina (1992). “Tożsamość i identyfikacja narodowa w perspektywie historycznej i psychologicznej”, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo,* XXXVI (1).

6. Lamanaité, Greta (1995). “Stereotyp Polaka w oczach Litwina”, in T. Walas (ed.), *Narody i stereotypy.* Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury.

7. Łojka, Oleg A. (1995). “Polak w oczach Białorusina”, in: T. Walas (ed.), *Narody i stereotypy,* Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury.

8. Okińczyc, Czesław (1995). “Stereotyp Litwina w oczach Polakach”, in T. Walas (ed.), *Narody i stereotypy.* Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury.

9. Oppenheim, A.N. (2004). *Kwestionariusze, wywiady, pomiary postaw.* Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka.

10. Sadowski, Lesław (1999). “Polacy i Białorusini: stereotyp nieantagonistycznego współistnienia (1864–1918)”, in J. Maciejewski (ed.), *Przemiany formuły polskości w drugiej połowie XIX wieku.* Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich.

11. Venclova, Tomas (1995). “O problemie stereotypu litewskiego”, in T. Walas (ed.), *Narody i stereotypy.* Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury.

12. Vladislav, Jan (1988). “O doświadczeniach z historią albo edukacja uczuciowa 1938–1968”, *Res Publica,* 12: 36–40.

13. Ziejka, Franciszek (1995). “Mieszkańcy smutnej arkadii. Szkic do portretu Białorusinów w polskiej literaturze”, in T. Walas (ed.), *Narody i stereotypy.* Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury.